

CSD&S Group Exercise

Whose Context Is It Anyway?

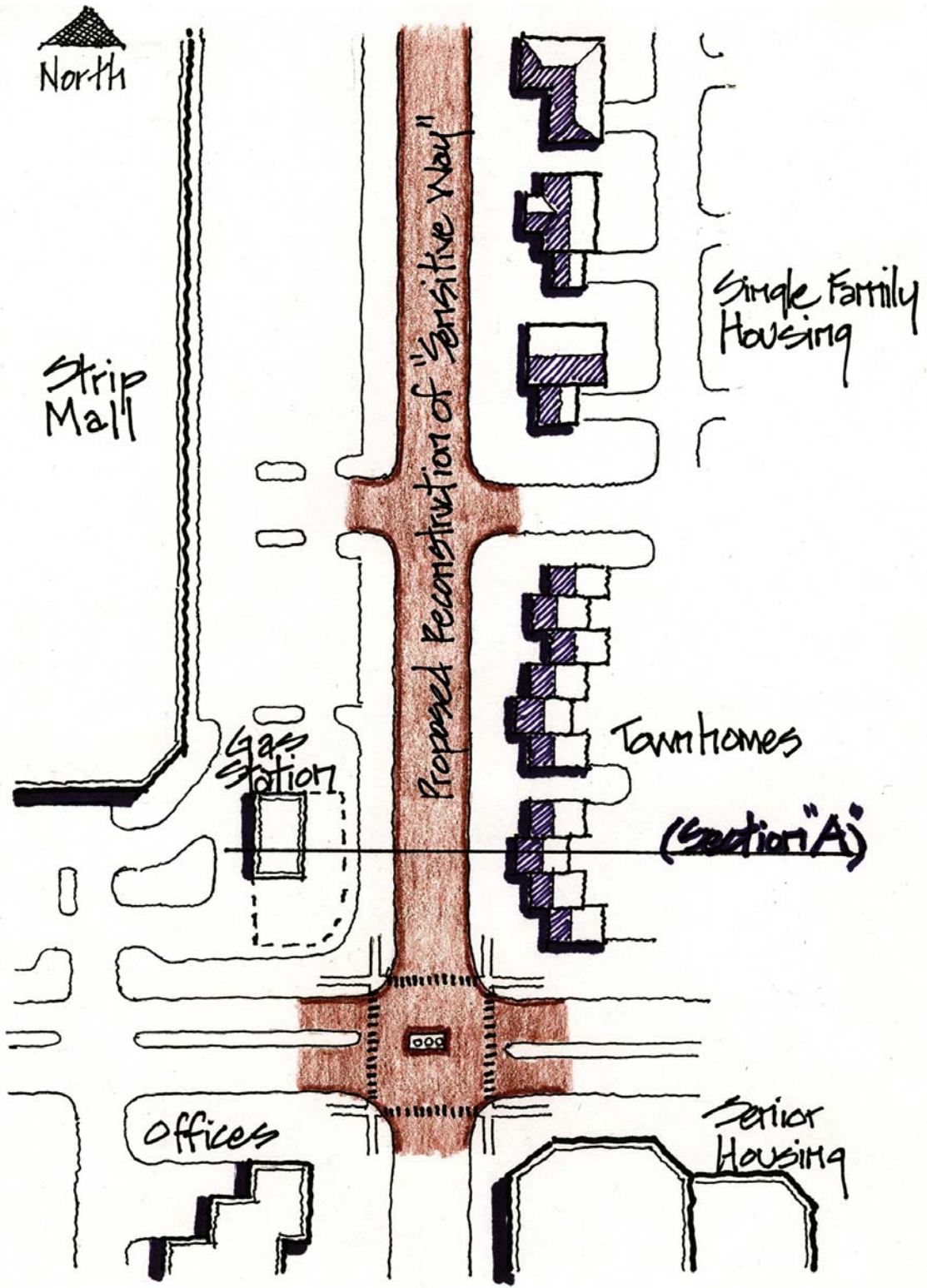
By Scott Bradley

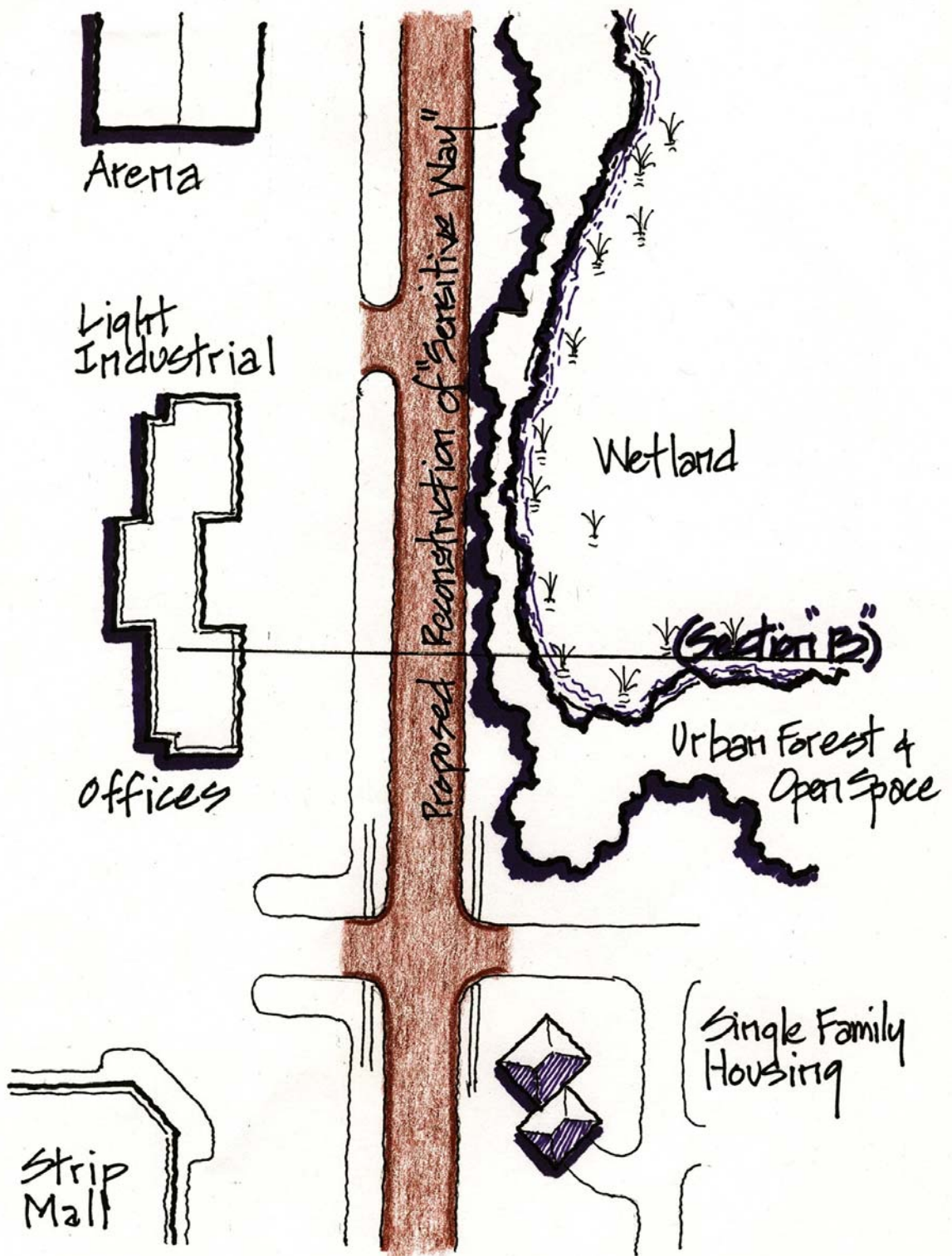
Visualize this scenario:

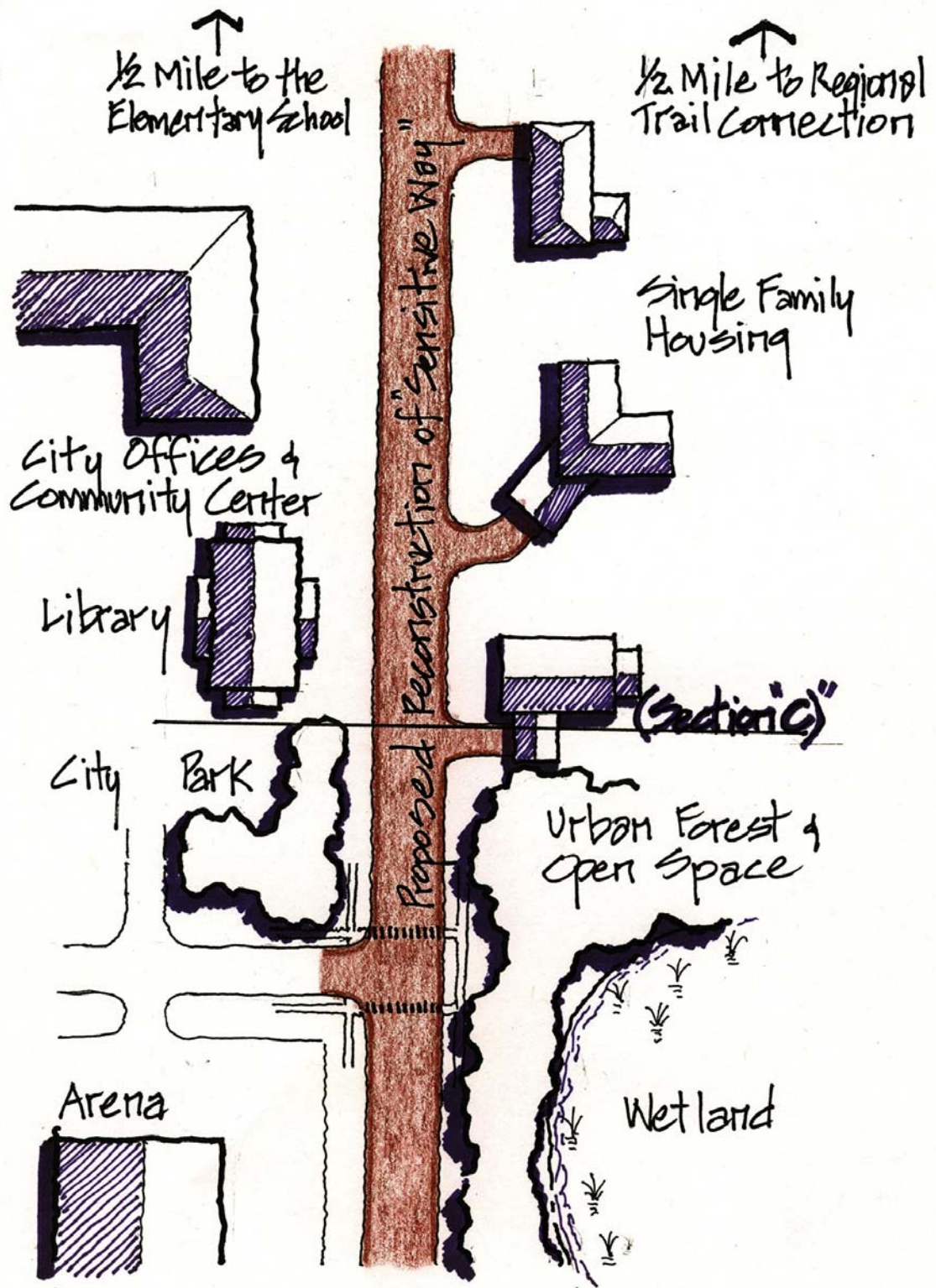
- Your highway segment of concern exists as a 1-mile long, 4-lane undivided roadway with narrow shoulders, no turn lanes and a posted speed limit of 45 mph in a suburban community with growing residential and commercial development pressures.
- Both ends of the highway segment transition from signalized intersections to 4-lane divided roadways with additional access control and left turn lanes.
- The areas immediately adjacent to this segment of highway are already developed as residential, business, retail commercial and civic properties with interspersed parks, lakes, wetlands, urban forest, regional open spaces and varying terrain.
- The highway is functionally classified as a principal arterial although there are many uncontrolled direct access points to local land uses due to local needs and existing constraints (natural and built environment).
- This highway segment currently handles an average daily traffic (ADT) level of 28,000 vehicles and ADT is projected to increase to 45,000 ADT by 2020.
- The highway is currently operating at or beyond capacity during peak travel times when bumper-to-bumper congestion occurs for up to 2 hours in both the morning and evening rush hour periods ... at other times, 85th percentile speeds average 53 to 55 mph.
- Signalized intersections only exist at the north and south ends of this segment (1 mile spacing) and striped pedestrian crosswalks exist at ¼ to ½ mile spacing intervals ... the frequency of accidents and injuries to motorists, pedestrians and bicyclists is three times the state average for similar facilities (rear-end and left-turning collisions have the highest frequency). Elementary and Middle schools are less than 2 miles away.
- Transit service is currently not available along the highway but a perpendicular bus route travels east and west at the north end of the segment.
- Dedicated pedestrian and bicycle facilities are discontinuous along the highway but there are adjacent off-road segments of regional multi-use pedestrian and bicycle paths.
- The visual character of the highway corridor and visual cues for multi-modal users varies widely from unattractive to attractive; incoherent to coherent; and wide-open to narrow view sheds based upon existing land uses, constraints and development patterns.

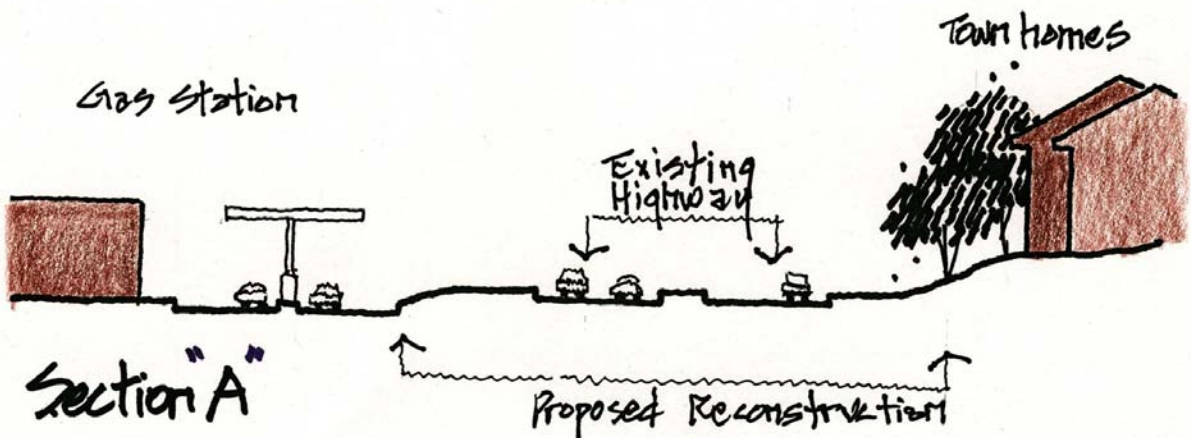
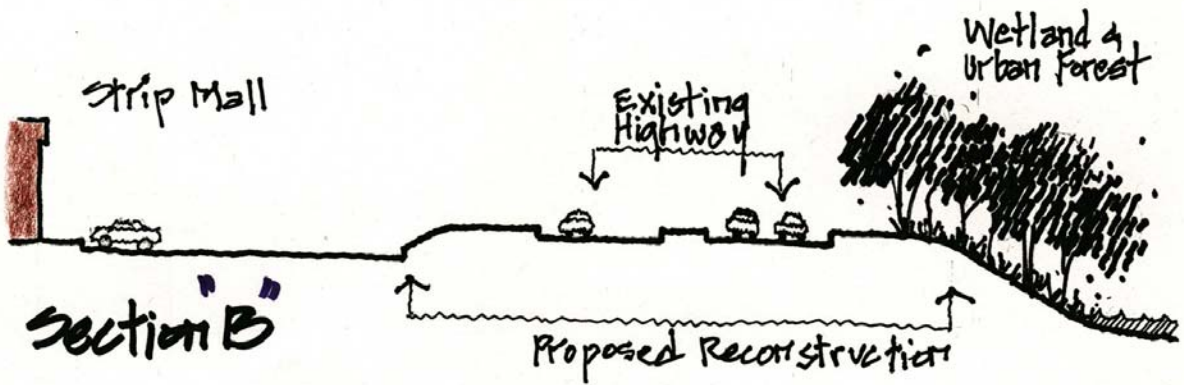
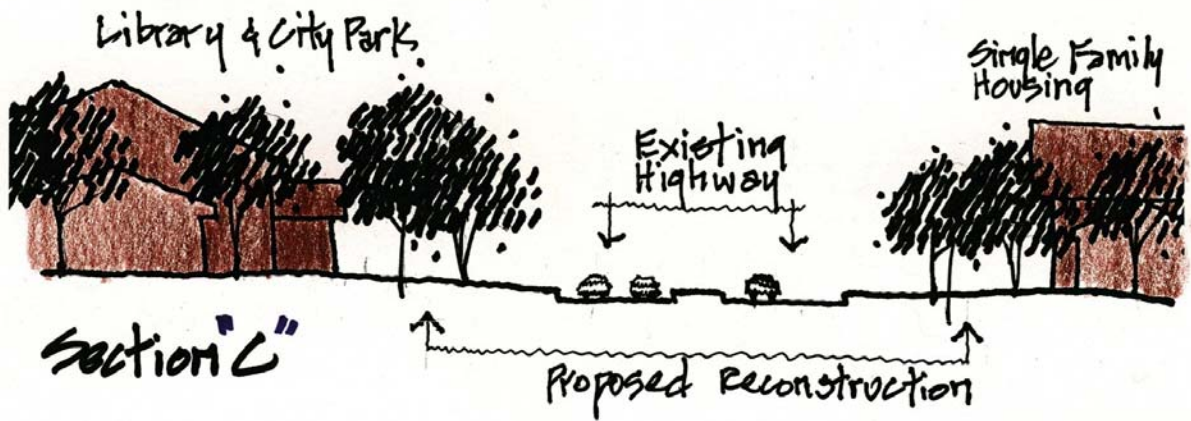
Now step into the role of your assigned stakeholder group (*attached*) and attend a public presentation of the proposed reconstruction project that is intended to address safety and mobility deficiencies along the highway. Do you agree or disagree? What are the real problems and needs from your stakeholder perspective? Provide or “vent” your opinions and feedback to inform the project manager and project development.

What’s the point to this exercise?









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Your stakeholder role:

You are a gas station/convenience store or coffee shop owner along the highway who doesn't see a mobility and safety problem. In fact, you think congestion is good for your business (spur-of-the-moment stop-in). You are opposed to adding medians and access controls because you think it is inconvenient for your customers and will hurt your business.

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Your stakeholder role:

You work at the new community library and park across the highway from a residential area. You are very concerned about the speed of traffic and safety of pedestrians. Parents across the road are very concerned about their children crossing the highway because there is no signalized intersection or pedestrian crossing by the park and library (although there is a marked crosswalk). Kids are running and riding bikes across the highway to and from the park and library wherever they find it convenient and drivers continually disregard pedestrians in the crosswalk area. It is just a matter of time before someone is killed.

or

You are a homeowner and parent concerned about the same issue because you know your children are running across the highway wherever they please to get to the park and library even though you tell them to go to the marked crosswalk or the nearest traffic signal to cross safely. You want less traffic, lower speed limits and more safe pedestrian crossings that are either signalized crossings or over/underpasses.

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Your stakeholder role:

You are an avid bicyclist and you want off-road bicycle trails and signalized crossings or, over/underpasses that will safely enable your family to ride their bicycles to local businesses, schools, parks and trail systems.

or

You are an avid and serious bicyclist and you want marked on-road bicycle lanes or wide shoulders so that you can safely commute and ride longer distances at higher speeds.

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Your stakeholder role:

You are a city or county transportation engineer or planner who believes the project purpose and need is to cost-effectively resolve the most critical mobility and safety problems on this principal arterial for the region. You want to see a 4-lane median-divided highway with higher travel speeds, turn lanes and controlled access (right-in/right-out only driveways, consolidated access points, etc.) with little or no traffic signal proliferation.

or

You are a city or county transportation engineer or planner who believes the project purpose and need is to resolve and balance the most critical highway mobility and safety conflicts with the most critical land use and community conflicts in the most cost-effective manner possible. You believe everybody needs to be willing to work together and make compromises or we can forget about getting public approval to get a much-needed project built.

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Your stakeholder role:

You are a natural resource specialist or environmentally concerned citizen who believes that proposed highway capacity and safety improvements will have adverse and unacceptable impacts on adjacent water quality and highly valued urban forest resources (trees) and wildlife habitat. You believe that capacity and safety problems can be addressed by simply working to shift excess traffic to other parallel roads. You believe that increasing the capacity of this roadway is a bonehead idea because more people will then begin using it until it is at or beyond capacity once again. You think there may be many more alternatives that might be friendlier to the environment and community?

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Your stakeholder role:

You are a member of the local arts board and community beautification committee and you think the existing highway is an ugly blight upon the community. You and your colleagues will not support any highway improvements unless investments are made in aesthetics, lighting and landscaping along the highway ... including planted medians and community entrance features. After all, the community is competing for residents, business, shoppers and visitors.

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Your stakeholder role:

You are an angry business owner and/or homeowner along the highway and you plan to fight any highway widening or taking of people's property. Besides, the highway works fine 80% of the time the way it is ... people are the problem ... not the highway. Every time the city, county, state or federal government tries to fix something, they screw it up for us and waste our tax dollars while infringing on our property rights. You took land from my brother back when you made this a 4-lane instead of a 2-lane and his property became almost worthless. You're gonna have one helluva fight if you try to ram this down our throats!

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Your stakeholder role:

You are a member of a transit alliance and do not believe increasing highway capacity will solve any of the existing problems. You firmly believe that land use conflicts need to be dealt with aggressively by exerting more controls and by applying urban design and smart growth principles to encourage transit friendly and pedestrian/bicyclist friendly redevelopment along the highway corridor. You believe this will optimize assets and livability for the community while sustaining appropriate growth and development. Your opinion is that the local and state government representatives are shortsighted and lacking in vision and coordinated efforts.

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Your stakeholder role:

You are among a number of elderly senior-housing residents who are very bothered by increased traffic noise and the fumes you smell from all the traffic back-ups. You think your health is being jeopardized and you want something done to reduce the traffic pollution, noise and odors.

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Your stakeholder role:

You live or work in the area and all you care about is being able to use the highway to drive to work and home and other destinations in the area quickly and predictably. You just want to get from point A to B and B to A and A to C and C to A quickly and without rush hour delays. You support the highway improvements as proposed but you are not sure they go far enough in terms of increasing speed and capacity and you are concerned that safety and mobility may be compromised by spending highway money on needless amenities.